

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

European College

MA Thesis

**SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY: COMMEMORATIVE HOLIDAYS IN POST-  
SOVIET RUSSIA**

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Tartu, 2015

I have written the Master's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

..... December 4, 2015

Student's code B19508

The defense takes place: December 18, 2015. Tartu, Estonia

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## ***ABSTRACT***

Holidays as a collective form of activity at all times is a reflection of the profound changing in society's values. The reducing need for a holiday, loss of interest in it indicates that values, represented in celebrations, lose their meaning. In turn, establishment of a new holiday or restoration of practices of events celebrated earlier imply a change of value priorities in the society. The Russian case of transformation of public holidays is in some way unique. The regime change in early 1990s did not lead to abolition of Soviet holidays, but demanded from the new government efforts to adapt to new realities.

This research shows the short history of introduction or evolution of three Russian commemorative holidays: Day of National Unity, Day of Russia, and Victory Day. All of them are intended to construct new Russian national identity, different from the old Soviet one. The analysis of discourse around these holidays suggests that due to the short history of the new state, political forces do not have clear understanding of essence of holidays and of ideas how they have to be celebrated. Without the agreement among political elite, it is difficult to construct new Russian national identity among the population. Currently, opinion polls show that two of studied holidays – Day of National Unity and Day of Russia – have not yet found their place in people's minds. However, Victory Day remains the main uniting holiday for all Russian citizens, although its history, connected with crimes of Stalinism, is sometimes regarded ambiguously.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Life in a modern society, with changing information flows and movement of capital and labour, forces people to find a new way to make sense of themselves in society, to determine the correlation of themselves with different social groups, and to review the established social identification. Hall (1996, p. 1) states, “There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’, at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique”. Since the time it was written, interest and discussion around the phenomenon of identity have increased. This is because essential features of modern life, state of society in countries, regions, and social and ethnic groups are studied through identity.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is in the crisis of national identity. Most people of working age in Russia had undergone changes of the shape of country’s borders, changes of social relations, and changes of ideas about the place of the state in world community.

What is the new identity of people in the Russian Federation? Today, the country continues to face the task of forming a unified general identity in the multi-religious and multi-ethnic Russian society.

The state of national identity is not only a prism through which the society is examined, but also an important factor in mobilisation of people and in their solidarity. That is why in recent time state institutions, as well as leaders of political movements, were concerned about the formation of identity with certain values, in which they are interested. Identity of Russians remains a field of discussion for political forces.

Complexity of studying the national identity stems from the fact that the current discourse, broadcasted by authorities, operates simultaneously with the discourse of opposition representatives. It is important to identify how different discourses reflect people’s minds and how discourse itself forms the national identity.

Public holidays are an important component of the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, pp. 1-2); it is important for the construction of unified

national identity. Representatives of the post-Soviet Russian government, addressing the issue of historical continuity, hurried to disown the Soviet past: Soviet holidays were partly cancelled, different awards, some monuments of the Soviet era, and other paraphernalia, reminiscent of Soviet times, disappeared. For example, instead of Day of Accord and Reconciliation, Unity Day was introduced; May 1 (International Workers' Day during Soviet times) is now celebrated as Day of Spring and Labour. However, after renaming holidays, heads of the state have not taken care of population with providing them appropriate and comprehensible legend. As a result, today 36% of surveyed Russians call the main national holiday – Day of Russia – as Independence Day of Russia (as it was called during Soviet times); most of the Russians still do not know why Day of Russia is celebrated on 12 of June (БЛИЗОМ 2011).

Sherlock says that if Russia continues its current policies, then it “will suffer from increasing bouts of amnesia” – idealisation of the Soviet era, which became in 1990s as a kind of “revenge of the past”. Enthusiasm for this “revival” of the Soviet era and nostalgia for the Stalin era clearly weaken the ability of society to define its political identity in civic and democratic terms (Sherlock 2007, pp 150-151). Sherlock warns that in case of increasing centralisation of power in Russia and the other contrary to democratic principles processes, the Russian state will remind more and more its Soviet predecessor, requiring enormous sacrifices of Russian society (Sherlock 2007, p. 185).

This research is of interest because the Russian case of transformation of public holidays in its own way unique. The change of regime in early 1990s did not lead to the abolition of Soviet holidays, but demanded from the new government their efforts to adapt to new realities. It is clear that the denial of Soviet ideology encouraged the search for new meanings and narratives of events that could form the basis for the revision of the genealogy of the Russian state. Thus, studying the Russian holidays, it is possible to trace how the ideological foundation of the new regime was established, and to identify competition in production of ideas.

The need for understanding the potential of public holidays in Russia determines the relevance of attention to practices of their use by power and other political actors. This research, by studying public holidays, is intended to clarify, on the one hand,

particularities of construction of national identity, the legitimisation of the political regime, which contributes to better understanding of political, social, and cultural changes in society. On the other hand, it discovers what Russian political forces are involved in the competition for the interpretation of political reality and what alternative meanings they use.

The academic input of this work is that the research can help expand the theoretical and methodological basis for Political Studies. Its importance also lies in the structuring of concepts of political parties on the occasions of commemorative holidays, which can allow using them in other analyses of celebrating practices.

The research problem of this thesis is that in today's Russia there is a disagreement among political parties about ideological filling of some holidays, remained from Soviet times, and holidays, which were introduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The aim of this thesis is, using literature review and data evidence collection, to answer the research questions:

what is the history of introduction of studied commemorative holidays and what are the reasons for changes of names and celebration dates that have been made?

what are the positions of political parties and what is the general attitude of the population about studied commemorative holidays?

is there a connection between what ideological meaning parties put into holidays and how population perceives it in practice?

Tasks of the Master's thesis are:

to analyse the role of holidays in the construction and maintenance of collective identity;

to divide public holidays in Russia into groups and to define stages of their transformation for their more convenient use in the analysis;



to trace the history of establishing of three Russian commemorative holidays and to analyse their meanings, fulfilled by political elite, as well as to analyse population's attitude to these holidays;

to assert a confidence that new holidays in Russia could become a tool for promotion of national identity, however they still do not perform this function, whereas the old Soviet holiday shows tighter national bounds even in a new young state.

The first chapter "Commemorative holidays as a way of formation of national identity" deals with modern scientific approaches to the study of national identity. The chapter presents the analysis of public holidays as a way of constructing identity. The chapter also describes the methodology used for the empirical part of the research alongside with the short description of data sources.

The second chapter "Transformation of Russian festive culture in post-Soviet times" presents the cultural analysis of three modern commemorative public holidays in terms of the transformation of the holidays' content as a result of the reception of historical heritage: Day of National Unity, Day of Russia, and Victory Day.

The conclusion summarises research findings and identifies main trends in contemporary commemorative holidays of the Russian Federation.

## ***CHAPTER ONE: COMMEMORATIVE HOLIDAYS AS A WAY OF FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY***

Construction and maintenance of collective identity, legitimation of existing order, and planning of future are part of functions that holidays are capable to perform. When political regime is changing, targets of domestic and foreign policy usually dramatically change too, but it does not always lead to the rejection of the symbolic heritage of the previous period (Rolf 2009, pp. 351-352).

Studying public holidays of transition and transforming societies allows learning how value systems are changing, how the competition of ideas is going on, and how historically significant selection of areas for development is being implemented.

Study of commemorative holidays also allows taking into account particularities of national identity construction and political regime legitimation, which contributes to a better understanding of political, social, and cultural changes in society.

Not so many publications are directly devoted to the topic of this thesis. However, there is a number of works devoted to specific aspects of the subject under study. This allows the study of practical aspects of the use of holidays in Russian context, based on existing experience.

Valuable contribution to the research is based on works of authors engaged in study of historical memory and the use of past in politics. As a classical work, analysing different kinds of practices that seem old and rooted but in fact are not, is considered the book “The Invention of Tradition” edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). The topic of politics of memory in Russia in 1990-2000s explored by Koposov (2011), Miller (2012), Sherlock (2011), et al. They pay attention to the study of causality, assessments of events, the practice of using the history of certain political forces in Russia today. Koposov (2011) provides an overview of the evolution of collective representations of past and history politics in Russia of 1985-2000. Miller (2012) discusses the political use of past in XXI century. Sherlock (2012) writes about how the United States and Russia view their contentious past.

Important are studies that reveal particularities of state official rituals and their role in political system and political culture of Soviet society. These include monographs by Glebkin (1998), Rolf (2009), Zygulski (1981). Glebkin (1998) raises many questions about Russian-Soviet continuum and its features, unfolding through time. Rolf (2009) examines creation and perpetuation of large-scale celebrations such as May Day, the anniversary of the October Revolution, Harvest Day, and others throughout the Soviet era. Zygulski (1981) conducts a detailed analysis of the transformation of both European and Soviet model of holiday.

There are not so many scientific publications, which would have raised the question of the meaning of public holidays in post-Soviet Russia. However, the book of Smith (2002) should be highlighted, in which one chapter is devoted to developments in the Russian festive calendar of Yeltsin presidency.

Notable is the collective work “National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity” (ed. McCrone 2009), in which authors consider the use of national holidays in a change of political regime, and as a tool that construes national identity. However, the book does not disclose other important functions of holidays. Russian case in this paper is not specifically addressed.

It is possible to say that at present the number of political studies, devoted to the thesis’ concerns about selected holidays, is small. Thus, despite the presence of numerous works on holiday’s culture, there is a need for a more systematic study of the political functions of public holidays, including Russian material.

### ***Role of commemorative holidays in the construction of national identity***

Many researchers, using constructivist strategies for studying nationalism, believe that identity is constructed by political elites and intellectuals, and not generated by itself and is not inherited from history (Anderson 2001; Hobsbawm 2002). Such activity on the construction of identity embodies the so-called identity politics, which represents significant symbols by educational policy, public holiday, socially significant daily practices, and so on.

Political elites act as an unconditional subject of identity politics, another thing that they are heterogeneous, and positions of different groups differ in terms of assessment of identity. A special role in the politics of identity belongs to intellectuals and intellectual communities. Identity politics, pursued by the state and the elites, aimed at consolidation of the society, creating macropolitical identity, achieving internal unity, and integration within the existing nation. Identity politics provides the stability and vitality of the modern state. The instruments of this policy, according to Malinova, are the “official language, school programmes, the requirements related to the acquisition of citizenship, national symbols and holidays, renaming of topographic objects, and so on” (Malinova 2010: 91).

Modern politics takes aesthetic, entertaining character. Mosse says in this regard about the emergence of “a new political style” (Mosse 1975: 7) in which “any political action has to be transformed into a spectacle” (Mosse 1975: 18). Holiday performs a special role in ritual consolidation of political myth and identity formation using aesthetic means. Holiday serves as means of reproduction of identity.

There is an approach which provided by authors of the monograph “National days: Constructing and mobilising national identity” (McCrone 2009). They define national holidays as “unstable signifiers”. Authors of the monograph convincingly show that over time all national symbols become the subject of editing, rewriting, revising, and even deliberate destruction by ruling elites. However, unlike conventional national symbols, national holidays do not appear to us as a constant empirical reality or daily ‘flagging’, which stabilise our sense of collective identity (Geisler 2009: 16).

Causes of “instability” of national holidays lie in the fact that holidays are cyclical and occur only once a year; despite the fact that holidays make 24-hour “pause” in life, people can deliberately ignore them, not perceiving as “something special”; their meaning may change over time (Geisler 2009: 17).

As the “unstable symbols” (McCrone 2009), holidays, according to Efremova, are a way of building of identity and the construction of a single community. “National holidays are <...> an instrument of symbolic politics, stimulating solidarity and motivating to certain political action” (Efremova 2012: 308).

“Stable” national symbols, encountered in daily life every day, are just what Luhmann described as “background of social reality” (Luhmann 2000). In other words, they seem to complement the idea of national identity, maintain loyalty to various manifestations of national narrative. In contrast, national holiday is a direct expression of this narrative, and therefore plays a special role in series of symbolic tools, forming a sense of belonging to community (Geisler 2009: 15-16).

How is the understanding of state and national holidays as “unstable signifiers” connected with the given research? They are connected because the division into “stable” and “unstable” signifiers gives an answer to the question why some celebrations are rooted in community, while others are not. Thus, weak public holidays may signal problems with the definition of national narrative.

There are many examples of how some holidays are significant in spite of the length of its history, while others did not take root. As the experience of Australia, Germany, and Japan, national holidays are often relatively weak and are unstable symbols of national identity. This becomes apparent when they are compared with other national symbols. For example, the history of Germany during last 100 years shows that the Germans do not feel the need for a national holiday. Of larger value, in spite of contradiction, for them is a hymn, passed in 1922 by Ebert, the first president of the German republic.

For purposes of this study, it is important to analyse public holidays as unstable signifiers. This definition emphasises their special status among other state symbols. Repeating from year to year, they are able to play a national narrative.

Connection of symbolic politics and identity, carried out by the holiday, is noted by Assmann: “Holidays and rituals in the regularity of its repetition ensure transfer and dissemination of knowledge, anchoring identity, and thus reproduction of cultural identity” (Assmann 2004: 60).

Efremova defines the holiday as “a set of relatively stable and sustainable over time, constantly reproducing discursive practices and political interactions around symbolic events or dates” (Efremova 2011: 53). As a tool of motivation of political

behaviour, public holidays actualise the potential of political symbolism. The result of identity politics carried out by the holidays are the collective actions that are produced in the course of ideological and symbolic struggle for the reproduction of meanings and significance.

Efremova stresses, “The meanings, declared by public holidays, are meant as the only possible and legitimate. The result is that the holidays as symbolic systems and public political action, endowed with ideological content, are able to produce and impose representations of the social world. But we should not forget that the symbolic politics takes place in the public sphere and involves competition of meanings” (Efremova 2014: 73).

Political holiday actualises political values, introducing the most important elements of culture, such as the idea of the common past, symbols, moral and civilian values in the minds of citizens and reproduces a certain image of the past, justifying and legitimising the political foundations of the present regime (Saraykin 2011: 145). As a communicative phenomenon, the holiday creates the necessary for political elites version of political reality and operates by meanings of symbolic cultural context (Scherbinin 2007: 17).

The commonality of collective representations through shared rituals and symbols is able to generate a sense of national belonging and allows the integration into a single political community. One of these representations is national holidays. National holidays, organised on the territory of Crimea and devoted to Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War, large-scale naval parade in Sevastopol that was twice, in 2014 and 2015, visited by President, confirm the importance of symbolic meaning of such events for identity politics, and for the inclusion of new groups in the larger political community.

Therefore, the research has established that the political myth and ritual are the basis for identity politics, which in turn is an important instrument of symbolic politics. Through shared rituals and myths, the masses gain understanding of a single community within which they are located, thus forming a collective identity. The process of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm) is always associated with the implementation and formalisation, and the new tradition is always associated with the past, despite the fact

that this relationship for the most part is fictitious. The political holiday as a symbolic form of mythic ritual action, as means of constructing a political reality, embodies the main objectives and tasks of identity politics and is an effective mechanism for working with identity as it is visual means of representation of the authorities in the context of symbolic politics, repetition and consolidation of importance of events for collective identity of society.

### ***Methodology***

The empirical part of research describes the process of the formation of Russian public holidays in post-Soviet period. Features of the emergence of Russian public holidays (Day of National Unity, Victory Day, and Day of Russia), their mechanisation by political parties are studied. In addition, this study tracks changes in the perception of events by people.

This research's strategy requires the study of the subjective side of these processes and the disclosure of subjective values brought into celebration and practices that make up the ritual of celebration. Therefore, the study is conducted within the framework of qualitative approach using the process-tracing method.

As Bennett and George stated, "The general method of process tracing is to generate and analyse data on the causal mechanisms, or processes, events, actions, expectations, and other intervening variables, that link putative causes to observed effects" (1997: 4).

There are two types of process tracing method (Bennett & George, *ibid.*):

1. Process verification, which includes testing the possibility of matching observed processes among intervening variables predicted by previous theories; and
2. Process induction, which includes inductive observation of individual causal mechanisms and heuristic interpretation of these mechanisms as potential hypotheses for future testing.

The difference between these two methods is that verification process is based on deductive logic, which means that researcher pre-specifies well-defined alternative causal paths. The basis of inductive process is inductive logic of development theory. Nevertheless, both types of analysis are aimed at development of theory.

The research uses second method as it describes ways of development of celebratory practices of three public holidays in Russia.

There are five steps in applying process tracing method (Punton, Welle 2015):

1. Development a hypothesised causal mechanism. This step includes revising details to existing facts about developments of Russian commemorative holidays.

2. Operationalising the causal mechanism. This involves sequence evidence – the chronology of temporal events. The research shows how events happening in a particular order.

3. Collecting evidence. This involves gathering evidence (in this research it is collected from secondary sources) from data polls to show public opinion on holidays and what they mean for them and from official websites of political parties to show their attitude on public holidays. There are not so many sources with original information about studied holidays (except for Victory Day, since there are a lot of discussions around it throughout the years). Most of them repeat each other. Therefore, two main principles were used for selection of sources:

it has to be official website of political parties, public organisations, or it has to be a big and reliable media source (for example, news articles);

the content of the source is largely connected with at least one of three studied holidays.

4. Assessing the inferential weight of evidence. The evidence, after being collected, is presented in the research. In case of data polls, the information is presented in textual format. In case of analysis of sources that gives overview to opinion of political parties on holidays, apart from textual form, it also presented in tables.



5. The conclusions of a process tracing exercise. The research asserts a degree of confidence, based on the evidence collected, about the influence of political parties and their ideological work by the means of public holidays to population's opinion.

The subchapter "Symbolic policy on political agenda" shows the evolution of the symbolic politics of state in relation to holidays. The subchapter pays attention to political context in which holidays were formed, as well as it identifies main trends of its use. The periodisation of symbolic politics, which is described in the subchapter, is based on stages of transformation proposed by Malinova. In addition, the subchapter shows the division of Russian commemorative holidays into "Russian" and "Soviet" group. The logic of this division is explained on the example of history of introduction and development of main public holidays in Russia.

The research gives a detailed description (in subchapters called "History/background") of a sequence of events, in case of "Russian group" (Day of National Unity, Day of Russia), which led to introducing and changing the names and dates of holidays. In case of Victory Day, since there were not changes in name or date, it gives overall background for nowadays situation with celebration practices of this holiday.

This historical explanation and description contributes to the outcomes presented in subchapters "Data from polls" and "Position of political parties", where the research analyses current opinion of population and political parties about each of studied holidays.

The focus of next three subchapters ("Day of National Unity...", "Day of Russia...", "Victory Day...") is political actions and statements on the occasion of national holidays. These holidays are chosen because two of them were introduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and are supposed to build a common national identity for people of the new Russia, whereas Victory Day, in contrast, is inherited from Soviet times and already considered as the most uniting holiday even in modern Russia.

The analysis uses websites of political parties and public organisations containing congratulatory speeches and newspaper articles in leading journals, which allows to fix

the basic practice of celebrating holidays in analysed period and to describe them in this research.

The research analyses parliamentary parties (United Russia, Communist Party, A Just Russia, Liberal Democratic Party), since they are directly involved in establishment and abolition of public holidays, as well as non-parliamentary political parties (Yabloko, Right Cause), since they more clearly express their vision of political reality on the days of public holidays.

The research describes their attitude to each of these holidays and, based on it, divides it groups (for example, those who accept and those who deny a certain holiday) or summarises their general opinion and ideological filling of the meaning of holiday.

The study is conducted in the tradition of qualitative methodology, and therefore the results are not intended to identify quantitative characteristics of commemorative holidays in post-Soviet Russia. The focus of the research is parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties directly involved in the process of establishing and abolishing of public holidays.

The data used for the study is laws and regulations, official transcripts of greeting speeches, transcripts of meetings of the State Duma, materials from websites of political parties and public associations, interviews, and newspaper articles. The main criterion of choosing such data sources is a relation to occasions of public holidays as a whole, and Day of National Unity, Day of Russia, and Victory Day in particular. These holidays are chosen for the analysis because they are main state holidays in the Russian Federation, and every of them at certain level touch the issue of national identity.

The research analyses 42 articles, 6 speeches, 6 interviews, 2 transcripts of the meeting of State Duma, 8 data polls, 3 laws and regulations, takes materials from 6 official websites of different political parties,

Results of discourse analysis are supplemented and verified by data of sociological surveys conducted mainly by the Fund “Public Opinion” (Фонд «Общественное мнение»), WCIOM (ВЦИОМ), and Levada-centre (Левада-центр).

All analysed materials are taken from 1991 until now. There is no narrower period samples to avoid distortions of discourse. The selection of this period is associated with the fact that the research covers discourse analysis of political parties only in new Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is objective because after the regime change political parties appeared as such and how they build their ideological narrative, especially using a symbolic tool of commemorative holidays, is of interest for this research.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: TRANSFORMATION OF RUSSIAN FESTIVE CULTURE IN POST-SOVIET TIMES***

Collapse of the Soviet Union led to transformation, which covered all spheres of Russian society, including festive culture. One component of the latter is public holidays. They have always played an important role in the ideological politics of state, strengthening the link between people and government through joint communication, fixing events and dates, significant for country's public consciousness (Shapovalov 2013: 20) .

Further subchapters analyse the process of formation of Russian public holidays in the post-Soviet period. It traces the fate of Soviet holiday (Victory Day), as well as newly established holidays (Day of National Unity, Day of Russia) in the modern calendar. The research studies the features of appearance of these holidays, their integration into the public consciousness, the degree of popularity among the population, and the competitive narratives around these holidays suggested by political parties.

### ***Symbolic policy on the political agenda***

Symbolic policy on public holidays is part of political course pursued by state. On this basis, it is possible to distinguish four stages of transformation of public holidays:

- 1990-1994 – denial of totalitarian past and first attempts to adapt Soviet holidays (includes the introduction of Day of Russia);
- 1995-1999 – the call for a new national idea, the search for state ideology, and work on filling Soviet holidays with new meanings;
- 2000-2011 – the transition from the narrative of “new Russia” to “thousand-year history”, selective attitude to past, and the reform of Russia's festive calendar (includes the introduction of Day of National Unity);
- 2012 – Present – a new formulation of the problem of collective identity and better targeting of certain public holidays (Ефремова 2015, pp. 12-13).\*

\* The development of Victory Day celebrations have taken place throughout all these stages.

First stage was associated with a justification of the course on the radical transformation of political order, which was manifested in the rejection of a number of Soviet symbols and holidays. Constitution of the USSR Day was repealed, first attempts for transformation of the main state holiday of the USSR, the Great October Socialist Revolution, were made, and new holidays in Russia were established. In general, the search for new bases of identity occurred in conditions of formation of the political design of new state and ongoing confrontation between president and parliament.

In second stage, changes were related to the search for new perspectives of interpretation of victory in the Great Patriotic War, to the renaming of the anniversary of the Great October Revolution, which was a key element of Soviet narrative, to Day of Accord and Reconciliation. At the same time, there was a search for a new national idea; in this context, Yeltsin renamed June 12 to Russia Day, marking the most important holiday. However, changing the name of holiday came into force only in 2002.

The core of the third stage of symbolic politics was the idea of President Putin to create an image of a strong state with respect to past. During this period, there had been major changes in Russian policy in the field of public events that marked the most suitable practices and meanings of celebration. Thus, the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory was one of key events in the history of country. However, significant changes with already existing holidays occurred. For example, November 7 lost the status of national holiday. To replace it, Day of National Unity was invented. At the same time, Constitution Day, which itself would have become a symbol of new state, lost its official status.

In the new stage of symbolic politics, along with the theme of the unity of state and citizens in the context of November 4, so-called “spiritual bounds” began to be used as the ideological basis of national identity. With the presidency of Vladimir Putin, importance of “spiritual bounds” is also stressed in congratulatory messages on the occasion of Christmas. Power sees in them the conservative base of Russian identity, to which Western values increasingly represent a threat. The most noticeable effects from

the use of these categories can be seen in foreign policy rhetoric. Declared conservative values of “Russian world” are used to mobilise population in fight against external threats that supposedly can disrupt existing social consensus in Russian society.

The change of power in country after August and December events in 1991 did not lead to the abolition of Soviet state holidays. This was due to the following reasons. Firstly, Soviet state holidays had a long history of approbation in society, because namely the creation of history of holiday, the supply of its mythological aura was of a great significance in terms of strengthening state ideology. Second, the vast majority of population was attached to Soviet festive culture from childhood through activities of Pioneer and Komsomol organisations, as well as personal involvement in festive communication that bound people, united for a common goal. Third, for the complete abolition of the Soviet system of public holidays, it was necessary to find new constructs and fill them with ideological content, which was quite a challenge.

As a result, Russian holiday calendar from the beginning of new Russia was a bizarre consistence of Soviet and emerging Russian holidays. In this regard, for an objective analysis of the current state of public holidays in Russia, it is advisable to distinguish two groups of events that form the basis of modern calendar. The research conditionally denotes these groups as “Soviet” and “Russian” and analyses one holiday from the first group (Victory Day), and two holidays from the second group (Day of Russia, Day of National Unity) separately.

The formation of “Soviet” group took place because Russia inherited a number of socio-political and public holidays of USSR: New Year, International Women’s Day, International Workers’ Day, Victory Day, Constitution Day of the USSR, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution (*Кодекс законов о труде РСФСР*, 1971, art. 65). Even at first glance, it was clear that some of these events did not meet new realities. However, they retained their meaning. According to Rolf, it happened because Soviet holidays were resistant (Rolf 2006: 354).

Rolf argues that even during deideologisation at the last stage of the Soviet Union, holidays did not completely lose their purpose – to influence the formation of the cultural lifestyle of Soviet man. This didactic mission disappeared after 1991. Driving force

behind the organisation of holidays now is not so much central holiday committees with their pedagogical ambitions, but rather decentralised formations of “amateur art”, as well as retail space owners and sponsors. Amateur art was a Soviet phenomenon, so it is very significant for the stability of Soviet notions that this term has migrated to new Russia. (2006: 354-355).

First changes in names and in the list of Soviet state holidays were made on 25 September 1992, when there was an adoption of the Russian Federation law “On Amendments and Additions to the Labour Code of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic” (“О внесении изменений и дополнений в Кодекс законов о труде РСФСР”). As a result, country had established the following holidays: New Year, International Women’s Day, Spring and Labour Day, Victory Day, Day of Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian Federation, and the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution (*Ведомости Съезда народных депутатов Российской Федерации и Верховного Совета Российской Федерации* 1992, №41, art. 2254).

Adoption of the law not only contributed to the consolidation of a new system of official public holidays, but also made first change in the “Soviet” group of holidays (Shapovalov 2013: 21). The USSR Constitution Day was deleted from calendar, and other holidays have retained their position. Changes were made in names and the duration of some Soviet holidays. For example, International Workers’ Day turned into a celebration of Spring and Labour, and the celebration of the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution has been reduced to one day.

By 2005, “Soviet” group consisted only of three holidays – International Women’s Day, Spring and Labour Day, and Victory Day. Currently, these public holidays not only maintain their position in holiday calendar, but also popular among population. According to a survey conducted by WCIOM on 24-25 April 2010, about two-thirds of the Russians are celebrating May Day. According to the survey of the same year, International Women’s Day and Victory Day are the most important holidays for 31% and 38% respectively (ВЦИОМ 2010, *Первомай празднуют две трети россиян*).

The formation of the “Russian” group of holidays took place due to several reasons. Firstly, after the formation of independent Russian state, there was a need in the

construction of a new system of public holidays, which would be subjected to different views and values. Secondly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, some holidays automatically lost their ideological content, such as USSR Constitution Day or the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Thirdly, during the formation of Russia, many occasions and events could form the basis for new public holidays.

Date December 12, 1993 acquired a great importance in the political life of country. On this day, together with elections to the State Duma, there was a referendum on the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Naturally, that such an important event in recent history was the reason for the introduction of another public holiday. In 1994, to Russian holiday calendar was added a new date: December 12 – Day of Constitution.

However, Day of Constitution did not become a national holiday either. The poll of the Fund “Public Opinion” (Фонд «Общественное мнение»), conducted in 2001, showed the most popular Russian holidays. According to results, the Constitution Day took the last 16<sup>th</sup> place, losing in ranking to New Year, International Women’s Day, Victory Day, old New Year, Defender of the Fatherland Day, May Day, Day of the October Revolution, and Independence Day of Russia (Калачева 2003).

Apparently, this happened due to the following reasons. Firstly, in new reality it was not possible to use old national practice. For example, in the USSR, under the mobilisation of society, the celebration of Constitution Day turned into a nationwide celebration, especially in 1930s (Шаповалов 2012, p. 82). Secondly, the frequent change of the date of Constitution Day celebration in 1918, 1924, 1936, 1977, and 1993 prevented this holiday to firmly entrench in public consciousness. Third, purely ideological content of new holiday hampered adequate celebratory practices, which were essential to its integration into public consciousness.

The following updating of the “Russian” group occurred in 2001 with the adoption of new Labour Code. For the first time in Soviet and Russian history February 23, Defender of Fatherland Day had become a national holiday. Defender of the Fatherland Day only with a high degree of conditionality could be called a new holiday, because by this time it had quite a long history and traditions of celebration (Shapovalov 2013: 24).



Over time, celebration from a purely military transformed into men's holiday, because it was implied that all cohorts of men are protectors of the Fatherland. At present, Defender of the Fatherland Day is a gender couple of International Women's Day. On the day of March 8, all women in country are congratulated, regardless of their age and status, and on February 23 – all men, without specifying membership in Russian army (Shapovalov 2013: 24).

In summary, it can be noted that now "Russian" group of public holidays includes three celebrations: Defender of the Fatherland Day, Day of Russia, and Day of National Unity. Since Defender of the Fatherland Day is defined in the research as gender, but not political holiday, only two of the rest will be examined in next subchapters. In addition, modern state holiday calendar includes three "Soviet" holidays: International Women's Day, Spring and Labour Day, and Victory Day. Since Victory Day can be considered as the most influential in the issue of construction of national identity, it also will be regarded separately in this research.

#### ***Day of National Unity (November 4): transformation of the meaning of the Soviet holiday***

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the problem of the unity of nation urgently stood in front of Russia. The rise of nationalism, religious radicalism, regional isolation, and local wars have called into question the very existence of Russia as a single state and the nation.

#### ***History/background***

The latest holiday, added to the "Russian" group of holidays, was Day of National Unity.

On November 7, 1996, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation "On the Day of Accord and Reconciliation" («О Дне согласия и примирения») was introduced. Introducing new holiday, authorities attempted transformation of the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. For this, November 7<sup>th</sup> was declared as Day of Accord and Reconciliation. According to reformers, new holiday was to promote unity and consolidation of Russian society (Shapovalov 2013: 21).

However, from beginning it was clear that the attempt to transform the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution to Day of Accord and Reconciliation had a little chance. Many questions surrounded the ideological component of new holiday. Who or what had to reconcile on this day – democratic and socialist form of government, the capitalist and socialist mode of production, democracy advocates and their opponents, or the Russian and Soviet period of history? An attempt to change semantic characteristics of November holiday only emphasised its ideological determinism (Filina 2015: 15).

In early 2000s, Russian authorities had attempted to completely replace the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution from social consciousness. On December 30, 2001, a new Labour Code was adopted. It reflected changes that occurred with public holidays. For example, there was a holiday, which officially had double name: November 7 – the anniversary of the October Revolution and Day of Accord and Reconciliation (*Собрание законодательства РФ* 2002, № 1, art. 3).

November 7<sup>th</sup>, Day of the October Revolution, was the most important holiday of Soviet calendar (Fursov 2014). The dominant feature of this holiday is its ideological content. It was the idea of the birth of new world and the destruction of old; the understanding of the date of November 7 as the starting point of a new model of historical time determined its leadership in the Soviet era. However, over time, ideology weakened, and communicative function came to the fore (Fursov 2014).

The idea to make November 4 as a holiday, Day of National Unity, was suggested by the Interreligious Council of Russia in September 2004. It was supported by the Duma committee on labour and social policy, and thus acquired the status of parliamentary initiative. On December 27, 2004, the draft was adopted in third reading and became law (*4-е ноября – День народного единства* 2015).

In the same year the Law of the Russian Federation of 29 December 2004 “On Amendments to Article 112 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation” (*Собрание законодательства РФ* 2005, №1 (1), art. 27), was passed. Therefore, in 2005 the Russians got a new state holiday – Day of National Unity, which was designed to perform the function of displacement and substitution of the Day of the October Revolution (Попова 2011: 20). However, the chronological proximity of 4 and 7 November was to

direct people to the idea that a new holiday is an alternative to the anniversary of the October Revolution (Shapovalov 2013: 22).

Day of National Unity in Russia, November 4, is the youngest among modern holidays, but it concentrated the node problem of transformation of holidays in Russian culture. In minds of most people, this holiday has emerged as an alternative to the celebration of the October Revolution. Although the appearance of this date on calendar has other reasons, the chronological proximity of 7 and 4 of November led to this kind of perception of new holiday (Юрлова 2007). In the context of research, it is important that the transformation of November 7 to November 4 fully reflect the transformation of national identity, embodied in public holidays.

The date of the holiday was not chosen arbitrarily, but had a historical basis. In the autumn of 1612, November 4<sup>th</sup> (October 22 in Old Style), Moscow was liberated from Polish garrison, and there was a turning point in the struggle to preserve Russian statehood. Based on this historical fact, in 2004, the State Duma was suggested to introduce a new holiday – November 4<sup>th</sup>. It was approved, so in 2005, the calendar had a new state holiday – Day of National Unity. New holiday caused serious polemic in political and academic circles (ВЦИОМ 2011, *Четвёртое ноября: праздник под знаком вопроса*; ВЦИОМ 2010, *День народного единства: ускользающий смысл праздника*; ВЦИОМ 2009).

Holiday exists in culture according to its own laws, connected not only with external social determination, but also with internal needs of society as a whole and each person individually. It was this kind of a holiday in pre-revolutionary Russia. However, it should not be forgotten that this day organically combined secular and religious dimensions of culture: the day of liberation of Russia from foreigners and the celebration of Kazan Icon of the Mother of God (*Православные христиане отмечают праздник в честь Казанской Иконы Божией Матери* 2013).

The effectiveness of discourse around holiday largely depends on the perception of the organic nature of new holiday. In this regard, Day of National Unity, which, according to organisers, should supplant not only Day of Accord and Reconciliation, but also fight finally off nostalgia for the anniversary of the October Revolution. Arguments

for new autumn holiday also include the fact that in Russia there are no holidays associated with pre-revolutionary history. For new holiday, such events as the anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo or the Battle of Borodino were not taken, but the exile of the Poles in 1612, which have not left a trace in people's memory (Лебедев 2015).

### *Data from polls*

For many Russians new holiday remains unclear and artificial. Starting from 2005, inhabitants of country recognise that they do not celebrate Day of National Unity, but only enjoy day off. Moreover, polls show that most of the Russians cannot even specify the correct name of new holiday. Just over 40% of the Russians know that on November 4 Day of National Unity is celebrated. On the eve of the first Day of National Unity, a sociological survey was conducted in 46 regions of country. 33% of respondents believed that on November 4 Russia celebrates Day of Accord and Reconciliation, 8% were going to celebrate Day of National Unity, and 5% - Day of Liberation from Polish-Lithuanian invaders. The same survey showed that the majority of Russians reacted negatively to the cancellation of November 7 (ВЦИОМ 2005, *Народ в неведении*).

In addition, in early years of Day of National Unity, results of public opinion research of Russians showed the following: 34% regard positively this feast, and 47% - negatively. The most dissatisfied group of Russians were people older than 60 years, and this is not surprising: Day of National Unity replaced their former Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution. 48% of respondents aged 18-24, who did not grow up during Soviet times and can be considered as more open-minded to political changes group, had a positive attitude to the holiday, but only 27% - negative (ВЦИОМ 2005, *Ноябрьские праздники – старые и новые*).

In fact, the decision to cancel old holiday seems logical, because no celebration of the revolution can be discussed after its crushing defeat in the result of perestroika and coup d'état in 1991.

Despite the fact that government is constantly trying to explain to public that this holiday is important, people mostly do not understand this, considering it as usual holiday.

In minds of society, it did not occupy the niche, where identity is formed, which should be realised by every citizen, regardless of their place of residence and nationality.

It is quite difficult to talk about prospects of Day of National Unity in Russian culture, because not much time passed from the time of its introduction (2005). Sociological studies focus on various trends. According to the opinion poll in 2011, the percentage of respondents who do not know the name of holiday, celebrated on November 4, has gradually decreased. However, its exact name Russians remember less and less. 8% of respondents mistakenly believe that on November 4 country celebrates Independence Day of Russia, 4% - Day of Accord and Reconciliation, 2% - Day of the Constitution, 1% - Day of the October Revolution. Among other popular common variants of the name of the holiday are as follows: Day of Reconciliation, Day of unification of peoples, Harmony Day, Day of Solidarity, Day of Liberation from Polish intervention, Day of unity of people (ВЦИОМ 2011, *Четвёртое ноября: праздник под знаком вопроса*).

### ***Position of political parties***

The analysis of parties' discourse around this holiday is shown below. It is based on the sources, such as official websites of parties or journals on Day of National Unity in different years after its introduction. The preliminary analysis showed that all examined parties could be generally divided into two groups: first group supports the idea of Day of National Unity, and the second group denies it. The group, supporting Day of National Unity, includes "United Russia", "Just Russia", LDPR, and "Yabloko" (see Table 1). The table shows their main and mutual points in justification of this holiday.

Texts of ruling party United Russia are the closest to official discourse on November 4 in ideological content; it shares views with top officials. This can be explained by the position of party in power, which is the result of a rational strategy of Russian ruling elite, the implementation of which enables to strengthen presidential power and stabilise political regime (Голосов 2001, p. 6).

The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia intends to make Day of National Unity main national holiday of country (*Этот день очень важен для России* 2010). In

general, in the discourse of Liberal Democratic Party in first place affective component dominates.

Table 1: Parties and their justification of Day of National Unity

The basis for the adoption of Day of National Unity	“United Russia”	Liberal Democratic Party	“Yabloko”	“A Just Russia”
Holiday is a symbol of national unity	X	X		
Holiday is a symbol of a new state	X			
Rejection of Soviet legacy, replacing November 7	X	X	X	
Day of Our Lady of Kazan				X

(modified from Ефремова 2012, pp. 18-19)

The only reason for making holiday on November 4 Party “Yabloko” sees as to try to prevent the celebration of November 7 as the date of the October Revolution and to try to erase from minds of people all that was connected with Soviets as a consequence of this revolution (*День народного единства...* 2006).

The discourse of party “A Just Russia” occupies a special position. The majority of regional offices share a common course of party and support Day of National Unity. It emphasises the power of the spirit of Russian people, its ability to unite in critical conditions, the unity of all people, regardless of origin, religion or social status (*Председатель Совета Федерации...* 2006).

Opponents of Day of National Unity have a completely different argument (see Table 2).

The Communist Party denies Day of National Unity the most consistently, which is associated with renaming and then with the deprivation of the status of a day off November 7 – the anniversary of the Great October Revolution. Large in comparison with other political parties, the sharpness of Communist Party is manifested in its opposition to authorities. Establishment of Day of National Unity is regarded as a transfer of holiday (marked as “Questionable origin” in the Table 2), desire to oppose Communist Party and the Church, and thus to enhance the disunity of Russian people (*День народного единства и актуальные страницы истории* 2010). Overthrow of main communist holiday gives grounds to Communist Party to claim the role of main opposition force and to fight for the possession of symbolic power.

Table 2: Parties and their reasons to deny Day of National Unity

Grounds for denial of Day of National Unity	Communist Party	“Right Cause”
Deprivation of the anniversary of the Great October Revolution	X	
Questionable origin	X	X
Day of “national tragedy”		X

(modified from Ефремова 2012, p. 20)

Party “Right Cause” is the ideological successor of “Union of Right Forces” and takes a categorical position on Day of National Unity. November 4 for party is a failed attempt to fill an ideological emptiness (*4 ноября...* 2009) (marked as “Questionable origin” in the Table 2), formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the “Right Cause” is against restoration as a state holiday November 7 – the anniversary of the Great October Revolution, which is the day of national tragedy for Russia (ibid.).

Not being a parliamentary party, “Right Cause” in relation to official political discourse claims the status of non-parliamentary opposition force.

Overall, despite this holiday belongs to “Russian” group, it still has some connections with Soviet past. Therefore, it is possible to trace whether political parties have positive attitude to Soviet past on the occasion of this holiday, negative one, or they take neutral position. This is presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Willingness of parties to build a narrative around the Day of National Unity

	Own ideology on the Day of National Unity	No ideology
United Russia	X	
Liberal Democratic Party	X	
A Just Russia	X	
Yabloko	X	
Communist Party		X
Right Cause		X

However, main struggle around Day of National Unity was developed at the level of public organisations and was connected with the competition of meanings suggested by power and nationalist meanings and practices of celebration.

Already in the first year of celebration – in 2005, there was a so-called “Russian march” to uphold the “Russian nation and nationalism” (Козенко 2005). “Russian marches” were competing source of ideological “pole” of production of Day of National Unity’s meaning. Among founders of “Russian march” are “Eurasian Youth Union”, “Movement against Illegal Immigration”, People’s National-patriotic Orthodox Christian movement “Pamyat”, movement “Russian order”, and others. One of the main meanings of the discourse of power is the idea of “inner unity”. However, right-wing radical



discourse has been transformed and got ethno-nationalist bias: “the liberation of Russia from invaders” (Савина 2005), “unity and willingness to fight for national interests of Russian people” (Савина 2008).

The apotheosis of holiday can be considered as the only coordinated action by authorities in Moscow titled “We Are United”, which gathered 75 000 people. For the first time procession was attended by representatives of all four parliamentary parties. Participants of meeting listened speeches by the Secretary of General Council of “United Russia” and State Duma Deputy Speaker Neverov, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, from Liberal Democratic Party – Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, from “A Just Russia” – Sergei Mironov (*Лидеры КПРФ, ЕР, СР и ЛДПР...* 2014). In their speeches, party leaders emphasised the importance of the unity of all people in Russia. Many participants wore George ribbons. While a year before that, in 2013, Communist Party took initiative to cancel the celebration of November 4 – Day of National Unity “in connection with a sharp stratification of society” (*Отмена празднования 4 ноября...* 2013).

Therefore, discourse analysis of texts of political parties on Day of National Unity allows several conclusions. Firstly, the structure of political discourse on this holiday is characterised by asymmetry. Main criterion is related to Soviet political system, continuity of institutions, which in most cases coincides with the adoption of political event. Secondly, celebrating November 4, political parties negate the legacy of previous political regime. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, to extent that political parties can fill their political discourse regarding public holiday with new values, as well as use it, it says about their ability to claim power.

To sum up the above, main question today – whether new holiday will become a real holiday for Russians to unite them. There is no clear answer to this question. On the one hand, the historical fact of victory over foreign invaders and the unity of people in this struggle is aligned with the embodiment of identity, enshrined in the celebration of May 9 – “we are winners”. On the other hand, the memory of this historic event was erased during the Soviet era, and updating its content will be difficult. In addition, as in the case of Day of Russia, ritual forms of representation, both historical event and its significance for modern Russia, are absent. For November 4, to truly become Day of

National Unity, it is necessary not just to promote the new holiday, but also to reveal diversity and complexity of Russian history in its evolution, identifying key points as in the formation of statehood and in the self-consciousness of Russian society.

### ***Day of Russia (June 12): controversial status of newly created holiday***

On June 12, 2014, Russia in twenty-third time celebrated the state holiday – Day of Russia. However, question remains: what is still the essence of holiday, what is its deepest meaning?

### ***History/background***

June 12, Day of Russia, is among new holidays. The history of that date is as follows.

Russia's first national holiday was Day of Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian Federation. Its appearance was due to the following historical events. On June 12, 1990, the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the RSFSR was adopted. In this regard, the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation has announced the date of adoption of the Declaration, 12 of June, as holiday.

The status of national holiday that day acquired only in 1994 (*Собрание законодательства РФ* 1994, № 6, art. 591), when the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree, giving June 12 national importance – it became Day of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Russia. Document was signed four years earlier at the First Congress of People's Deputies in circumstances where former republics of the Soviet Union, one after another, became independent. Therewith, on June 12 in addition to the independence of Russia, the country got first popularly elected president

After the adoption of new Labour Code in 2001, holiday was renamed. . Officially, the new name of holiday appeared only on February 1, 2002, when provisions of the new Labour Code came into force (*День России: история праздника* 2012).

From the very beginning after the proclamation of new holiday, it caused a mixed reaction. First question arises – independence from whom? Why Russians still call

Sovereignty Day as Independence Day, because Russia has never been anyone's colony or patrimony (Дугин)?

Given that new holiday was positioned as the day of independence from the USSR, it was strange to see how Russia was universally declared as successor of the USSR. Because of this, new holiday could not accomplish its integrative functions (Shapovalov 2013: 23).

However, against the background of strained relations with Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimea, the associated rise of patriotism and growth of imperial sentiment, Day of Russia may acquire a new meaning.

On official websites, Day of Russia is called the celebration of “freedom, civil peace, and good agreement of all people on the basis of law and justice”. It is noted that the holiday “is increasingly acquiring patriotic features and becomes a symbol of national unity and shared responsibility for the present and future of Russia” (*День России 2015*, trans. by the author of the research).

### ***Data from polls***

New public holiday could not immediately gain popularity among the Russians, because it caused a number of issues in scientific community, in media, and among ordinary citizens (Shapovalov 2013: 23).

According to exit polls, 28% respondents were undecided, which holiday is celebrated in Russia on June 12. According to the Fund “Public Opinion” (Фонд «Общественное мнение»), in 2001 Day of Russia was celebrated by only 10% of Russians. However, in next year the number of those who celebrated holiday had fallen to 3%. Reserved attitude to new holiday was showed also in subsequent studies. In particular, a survey conducted in 2004, when it was required to indicate the official name of June 12, showed that about 25% of Russian citizens give wrong answer and it is hard for 33% of them to find a suitable name of holiday. For a significant number of respondents, this date is only an extra day off, but not a holiday (Дубин 2005, pp. 57-60).

Even more revealing data poll was conducted in 2011. According to it, 36% of the Russians called this celebration as Independence Day of Russia despite respondents were offered other variants of the name of this holiday – Constitution Day and Day of National Unity. Every 10<sup>th</sup> person knew about proclaiming sovereignty of Russia on this day; 4% believed that on this day Russia seceded from the Soviet Union and adopted the Declaration of Independence. About 18-20% of respondents believed that Russia did not manage to become a sovereign state, or it has lost the sovereignty which the USSR had (ВЦИОМ 2011, *День России отметили не все*).

It should be noted that Day of Russia has not yet become a real nation-wide public holiday. In minds of Russians, it exists more as a political construct and as one additional day off (Дубин 2005: 57-60).

The name of the holiday is always changing, and people have some glitches. However, majority, about 49-50%, say that on June 12 Day of Russia is celebrated. The number of people, who call the holiday Independence Day, is reducing. For 10 years the number of those, who think about this name, was reduced from 65 to 33%. However, someone still remembers that it was the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Russia – this is only 6%. 12% do not know what kind of day is this, or do not consider it as a holiday. Officially, it is declared as a free day, and people are willing to celebrate it as a day off (*День России на волне патриотизма* 2014).

However, the problem of functioning of Day of Russia is not only in this. To date, Day of Russia did not receive necessary substantive content, perhaps because the history of that day is very recent and it is not clear what place will be devoted to Day of Russia in historical memory of the Russians. In addition, there currently are no adequate ritual forms of culture, which would fix and implement social and integrating function of holiday. June 12 continues to exist in minds of most Russians as an extra day off and nothing more (*День России. Новое восприятие государственного праздника* 2014).

### ***Position of political parties***

As for political discourse around this holiday, it is possible to say the following. The review of official websites of parliamentary parties and transcripts of meetings of the

State Duma showed that in 2005 Day of Russia was not a subject of heated debate and was not an instrument for the promotion of any new ideas.

For a long time party “United Russia” did not claim on building its own ideology of the holiday, as evidenced by the lack of holiday greetings on the website of party and in transcripts of pre-holiday meetings of the State Duma. Individual performances and approaches to media of the Chairman of the State Duma Boris Gryzlov, such as in 2006, confirmed that the party did not set a goal to formulate a narrative of the holiday, but rather to maintain and set the course for “further dynamic and effective development based on social cohesion and unified strategy” (*Boris Gryzlov congratulated the Russians on the Day of Russia 2006*). For the party, by 2006, it became “the main holiday that unifies all inhabitants of country” (*Bike ride in honour of the holiday 2006*). As in the case with other projects, the party “United Russia” in practice rather played the role of “transmission belt” of the presidential administration in parliament and in regions. The significance of the party during celebrations is strengthened largely due to belonging to it governors and mayors, as well as most of regional and local legislatures. For federal leadership, following “United Russia”, Day of Russia is the main state holiday, which every year since 2007, the party celebrates with the festive pickets. Attempts from the ruling party to reformulate the narrative of the holiday have been clearly heard in 2013. A member of the party “United Russia” Fedorov and headed by him and hitherto unknown parliamentary club “Russian sovereignty” proposed to move Day of Russia from June 12 to another memorable date for country (Malay 2013).

Other political actors approached by 2005 without a clear idea and articulate practices of celebration of Day of Russia. The reason for this can be considered a general trend of de-ideologisation of environment in which political parties have turned to be in post-Soviet Russia.

Attempts of public ideological filling of the holiday in 2005-2006 from other political actors were represented, though in individual cases. In particular, it concerns parliamentary Liberal Democratic Party, Communist Party, and non-parliamentary “Yabloko”. Their attitudes towards this holiday are represented in the Table 4. Unlike in the previous subchapter, there is no clear division between acceptance and denial of Day

of Russia in political discourse, as well as this holiday completely belongs to the “Russian” group and does not have any connections with Soviet past, therefore this table is constructed rather on the grounds depending on the willingness of parties to build the narrative around the holiday or to stay neutral. Although it is also controversial, since each of parties showed different degree of participation during different years after the holiday was introduced. That is why the table shows only current attitudes of parties.

Table 4. Willingness of parties to build a narrative around Day of Russia

	Own ideology of the Day of Russia	No ideology
United Russia	X	
Yabloko		X
Liberal Democratic Party	X	
Communist Party	X	
Right Cause	X	
A Just Russia		X

The starting point in the formulation of the ideology of the holiday is the ratio of the Soviet past and events of early 1990s. Resources and the status of a party or association also play an important role.

“Yabloko” party, being represented in the Duma in early 2000s, has not resorted to the use of symbolic resources on 12 June. On the contrary, after losing its seats in Parliament, the party began to pay more attention to the holiday in order to assert its ideological positions. In 2005, the party called Day of Russia albeit controversial event, but the proclamation of new Russia, free from Soviet past (*15-летие провозглашения Декларации независимости России...* 2005). Later, leaders of the political party for a long time did not use the symbolic resource of Day of Russia. This can be explained by decreased activity of “Yabloko”, ideological crisis, and fragmentation within the party.

In the same period, 2005-2006, the position of parliamentary Liberal Democratic Party began to take shape, which later claimed the status of arbitrator. In 2006, the member of the party Bazhina announced that Russian history is not limited to 15 years, “Russia is more than a thousand years, it is a great power with a rich history” (*Transcript of the meeting...* 2006). In 2009, Liberal Democratic Party strengthened its position. As Communist Party, Liberal Democratic Party saw a negative “Yeltsin’s heritage” (*Birthday of Russia* 2009) in the holiday. Being aware of the values vacuum that has been formed over past few years due to leapfrog with new public holiday, party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy offered to “reconcile three Russias: monarchist, Soviet, and new democratic”.

Unlike other political actors over past 15 years, Communist Party has formulated its own narrative of Day of Russia as “the day of the greatest geopolitical catastrophe”. As parliamentary opposition, Communist Party needs every year to confirm this status, and this holiday came in handy. It was not difficult for leaders of the party to link events on June 12 with that “the country has lost all strategic conquest of the Soviet period on international arena, has lost its former superpower prestige, and became virtually a raw material appendage of the West” (Volkova 2005). Since the beginning of 1990s, the party resorted to the practice of pickets, which, however, have not always been numerous. However, Communist Party cannot be called a powerful political force that would be able to compete for the practice of celebrating Day of Russia. Extensive media coverage of celebrations, organised by power and “United Russia”, allowed achieving levelling of pickets. Communist Party stated about uncontested liquidation of holiday during presidency of Medvedev and after.

Parallel to official events, Russian opposition held the so-called civil nonpartisan rally “I am free!” (“Я свободен!»), which started on June 12, 2005, on Day of Russia (*Я свободен...* 2006). At the rally of more than two thousand people, activists of liberal non-parliamentary parties, including “Yabloko”, were seen. For non-system opposition, Day of Russia embodied most hope for a better future. Opposition enhanced using of public holidays, in particular June 12, for alternative marches. In the wake of rise of protest movements, holidays are seen as an opportunity to consolidate left and right opposition. For example, there was an organised in 2013 on Day of Russia “March for your and our

freedom!”, which became an opposition action in support of activists being harassed by authorities (*The party “Yabloko”... 2013*).

The holiday for the Liberal Conservatives “Right Cause”, even before the “reset” of the party, has been called “the first and important step towards democracy and freedom of seventy years of totalitarian communist build-up on the body and soul of Russia” (Дячкин 2009). Such an understanding, in the first place, is typical to the regional branches of the party. In 2011, the party called June 12 as the symbol of struggle for freedom against domestic government restrictions – “for the preservation of the direct election of mayors, media freedom, freedom of association, political competition, against the growing influence of security services” (ibid.), combat with vertical power.

At period 2006-2007, became active discussions around Day of Russia and its practical use by other political actors, including parliamentary parties and public organisations. Specified by power vector set for parliamentary parties the question of the consistency of main events of national holiday.

Party “A Just Russia” is often seen as a Kremlin project, “left” opposition of conservative “United Russia”. The idea of forming an opposition political party was made in March 2006 at the meeting of the chief ideologist of country, deputy head of presidential administration Surkov and chairman of party “Life” Mironov. Given this fact, it can be assumed, that in the face of parliamentary opposition, power was looking for possible reformulation of the narrative of celebration and expanding boundaries of national identity. It seems that there is no and there was no unity in “A Just Russia”. For someone Day of Russia remained the holiday of undeveloped parliamentarianism and decoy target. For federal leadership, after “United Russia”, Day of Russia was a major national holiday, which every year since 2007 party celebrated by festive pickets.

Thus, the obvious desire of ruling elite to get away from controversial events of 1990s through the formulation of narrative of thousand-year history is not proved to be successful. It left white spots in the formation of nodal points of national identity, which cannot be made up by any of political actors so far.



## ***Victory Day (May 9): Soviet holiday for the construction of post-Soviet identity***

### ***History/background***

In 1945, long before the birth of first persons of the majority of modern Russian state, the country called the Soviet Union won a long-awaited victory over Nazi Germany. Millions of Soviet citizens, regardless of their social status and ethnicity, age, and gender were hastening victory as they could (Леонков 2013).

Thus, it is Victory Day that is Russia's national holiday, serving as an annual symbol of national unity. If Irish communities in all countries celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, Russian communities celebrate not Orthodox Easter, not Day of Russia, but Victory Day. Sometimes with scandal and fight as in Baltic States and Ukraine, but they do celebrate it. It is because in the past century of social experiments, Russians have become a nation with shattered identity, and Victory Day is the last fragile link cementing it (Pozharskiy 2013).

The collapse of modern Russian identity is already evident in the fact that numerous attempts are undertaken to substitute the ideological content of the largest national holiday, Victory Day, by symbols of ethnic and regional identity. For example, in 2002, the celebration of May 9 in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, was carried out by bureaucratic elites in such a way that the focal point of celebration was contribution to the victory of Soviet soldiers of Tatarstan. The same symbolic substitution can be traced in the celebration of Victory Day in the North Caucasus, where the desire of a number of leaders to show contribution to the victory of titular peoples of their regions is clearly manifested. Among patriotic rhetoric is intention to resolve pressing political problems to normalise inter-ethnic relations is clearly heard. The image of common Soviet past in the public consciousness of peoples rapidly dissolves, exposing long-standing national sentiment and mutual claims. To suspend this process, according to federal centre and regional authorities, is possible, relying on the symbol of May 9<sup>th</sup>. However, to put hopes on Victory Day for the formation of civic identity is meaningful only when it becomes an all-Russian day of mournful commemoration of the dead and human suffering. Nevertheless, until now, it is possible to see the opposite, that May 9 is exactly Victory

Day, the celebration of Soviet Army over Nazi Germany (*День Победы в Великой Отечественной войне 1941-1945 годов* 2015).

The theme of Stalin's crimes during war and humanitarian price of victory are completely driven out of historical memory. May 9 celebration is not overshadowed by memories of victims of Stalinism. Victory Day and commemoration of victims of Stalinist deportations artificially separated and divided in public consciousness (Rahaev 2014: 3-4).

The relevance of this holiday is determined not only by maintaining its main content, but also by fixing it in ritual and ceremonial forms of culture.

These forms are different and include both historically developed and emerged recently. At the state level, such forms include a ceremony of laying wreaths on graves of the fallen on battlefield, and, of course, a military parade on Red Square and in major Russian cities (Ushakin 2013: 274).

Vividly these forms were shown in 2005 and 2015 – years of the celebration of the sixtieth and seventieth anniversary of the Victory. A number of public organisations initiated a new form – action “George Ribbon”. It is very important to update and consolidate historical and socio-organising meaning of Victory Day. Everyone, who fixed on his or her clothing or car St. George ribbon as a symbol of Russia the winner, thereby involved him- or herself in union of people and the commonality of their historical destiny. In addition, media in this case play an active role. All TV and radio channels on the day of celebrating victory see to not only congratulate veterans, but also look for new forms of actualisation of the historical meaning of events, which occurred on May 9, 1945, in minds of post-Soviet generation. Victory Day is a rare holiday when propaganda actions and actions of state find understanding and support of Russian people (Юрлова 2007).

However, there is also a contradictory side of this holiday. The vast majority of veterans of the Great Patriotic War, who actually took part in battle, died. The youngest veterans are very old; they are far from over eighty. The less these people, respected by all, are, the more the state seeks to demonstrate its concern for victorious warriors. In

everyday life, many of these old men are not wanted, and even high on Russian standards pensions cannot save them from illness and loneliness. However, every May 9 holiday begins displaying on parade barely alive veterans, inspirational speeches are pronounced, and salute thunders. The only question is for whom is this celebration? Different state won over Germany, state with different ideological orientations and values, with other people, and with other symbols (Полонский 2013).

At present, Russian society is experiencing a period of intergenerational transformation. This process will lead to the fact that the vast majority of members of public will learn about the Great Patriotic War from secondary and tertiary sources. To this, it is needed to add another factor: the memory of war was politically used for 70 years that have passed since the victory, but was used differently. Political objectives and context were changing. Victory Day was always celebrated, but in different ways. The highest flowering of the cult of the memory of victory came in Brezhnev period. In this sense, post-Soviet Russia inherited practices and format of Victory Day celebrations from the late Soviet era (*День Победы – вечная память* 2014).

### ***Data from polls***

41% of Russians believe the Victory Day is one of the most important holidays. In connection with it, they feel joy, not sorrow. This is according to the survey of “Levada Centre” (*Война как прошлое и будущее* 2015). In 1992, 25% citizens thought so, in 2005 – 32%, in 2014 – 36% of respondents. Experts believe that this is due to “injection of atmosphere of confrontation with the world” and the use of symbol of victory by state propaganda for its purposes (Перцев 2015). Among the most important holidays are own birthdays – 42%, birthdays of loved ones – 44%. In previous years family celebrations were more important than Victory Day for Russians. 65% of population are going to celebrate May 9 (Перцев 2015).

59% of the respondents on 9 May have a feeling of “joy at the fact that country has won the Great War”. Compared with 2010, the number of citizens who has the Victory Day as “sorrow for the millions who died in the war” decreased (Перцев 2015).

According to 31%, May 9 – “the official holiday”. As much Russians call it “national holiday”. 16% of respondents called Victory Day a holiday of veterans of the war (Перцев 2015).

The majority of Russians consider that it is the best to celebrate Victory Day by care for veterans, 29% say that “parades, processions, fireworks, official receptions” would be appropriate (Перцев 2015).

The point of view of citizens on the causes of war shifted. 31% of respondents think that “Munich Agreement” allowed Hitler to begin it, 19% called it was the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact”. In addition, 69% of Russians believe that the Soviet Union could defeat Germany without the help of allies, 22% believe that the Soviet Union could not do it (Перцев 2015).

67% of respondents believe that the Russian government is sensitive to the problems of war veterans, 24% of respondents claim that “there is no special attention” (Перцев 2015).

Victory Day is the only holiday where there is no doubt about its social significance. The vast majority of Russians regardless of their political beliefs, religion, gender, and age believe that this day is a major holiday and sacred day in Russian history. An important feature of Victory Day is that it compounds social and existential meaning. The war had gone through the fate of Russian people; every family, anyway, remembers terrible trials of war years. This memory is not supported by state and ideological slogans, but by the living memory of the people. For many families, Victory Day is not only and not so much a public, but deeply personal and family holiday. Not only families of war veterans celebrate this day; many others, gathering around holiday table, remember those who died for their homeland. Preservation and relevance of cultural and historical significance of holiday is the basis of its real being in the culture of modern Russia. Victory Day is the only day of the year, when to the question “who are we?” the society knows the answer, perceived by everyone: “we are winners” (Юрлова 2007).

### *Position of political parties*

If to talk about Russian political elite, it is worth noting that in early 1990s explicit attempts were made to adapt the memory of war to political context. This was expressed in a rather radical change in practices of celebration and in discourse, in which the celebration of Victory Day was formed. Yeltsin's political elite sought to draw a line that it was a victory of people, not the Soviet state, that it was not achieved due to regime, but in spite of it. Victory Day celebration was moved from Red Square to other sites, in particular, to the territory of memorial complex being built on Poklonnaya Hill. In 1995, celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War was held on Red Square again. From that moment parades on Red Square were held annually. Even in Soviet times, May 9 parade was held only in jubilee years, i.e. every five years. Partly decision on annual celebration is connected to the problem of the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War, which is very important for Russia and for the construction of new Russian identity. At the same time, the format, in which it is presented, is changing before eyes, because, again, the number of veterans is getting smaller and smaller, and to replace them, a new generation comes, which does not know war on personal experience. It needs to be reminded to consolidate this event in memory by relevant political and symbolic practices (*День Победы – вечная память* 2014).

Certainly, the government and political forces will continue to invest significant resources in maintaining the historical memory of war. At the same time, historical memory of different generations is inevitably varying. Reasonable to assume that everything will be done to ensure that younger generation will remember the Great Patriotic War (*День Победы – вечная память* 2014).

The ruling elite competitors in fight for the symbolic content of Victory Day can be considered both left and right movement. This fight also includes Communist Party, which sought to promote alternative meanings. For the party May 9 is a sacred holiday, symbols of which are undoubtedly Stalin, the CPSU, and Soviet people. In 2005, in the anniversary year of the Victory, parades of leftist organisations did not take place. Due to the importance of holiday, police representatives dispersed them (Сайдуклова 2005).

In 2006, the radical leftist youth organisations and the National Bolsheviks joined Communist Party. However, this did not lead to a successful cooperation. This was largely because different political actors saw different meanings in May 9. For example, “Yabloko” wants to show that authorities, hiding behind the great holiday, did not want truth about war (ЯВЛИНСКИЙ 2005). While the Communists from one year to the another resent the fact that presidents in their celebratory speeches do not mention a decisive contribution to the cause of the Great Victory of the Communist Party of the USSR and of leader Stalin.

In 2010 in Moscow, in the preparation of the celebration of May 9, took place public and political debates about the use of portraits of Stalin. This initiative was supported in Communist Party, for which victory cannot be separated from Communist Party and leader Stalin personally. Other positions are hold by Liberal Democratic Party and “A Just Russia”. The leader of Liberal Democratic Party said: “Hung portraits of war veterans, war heroes. Stalin’s portraits should not be hung on the streets” (*На плакатах ко Дню Победы должны быть герои войны* 2010). “A Just Russia” is more critical to activities of Stalin, recalling original plans for the conquest of Europe. While centrist “United Russia” has chosen the tactics of silence.

Use of Victory Day as a tool of symbolic policy was not only the way of attempts to empower holiday with new meanings, but also by alternative uses of the date – for protests of non-systemic Russian opposition. For example, on May 9, 2012, at monument to Kazakh poet Abay Kunanbayev, a protest camp “OccupyAbay” was organised, named so by analogy with protest movement Occupy Wall Street in the United States (Волков 2014: 155-197). The beginning of event organisation, however, is associated with the inauguration of Vladimir Putin, which took place day before – 8 of May.

This subchapter, as previous subchapters on the Day of National Unity and Day of Russia, contains a summarising table concerning political parties’ willingness to build a narrative around this holiday (Table 5).

Table 5. Willingness of parties to build a narrative around Victory Day

	Own ideology of the Victory Day	No ideology
United Russia		X
Communist Party	X	
Yabloko	X	
Liberal Democratic Party	X	
A Just Russia	X	
Right Cause		X

Despite some parties clearly express how they see the history of the Great Patriotic War, and some do not, the significance of the symbol of the Victory is not questioned by anyone, and the memory of the Great Patriotic War could serve as a basis for the construction of collective identity. The myth of war in post-Soviet Russia has become not only the subject of the decision of momentary power's objectives, but also shared and fertile idea of nation.

However, analysis of discourse of political parties shows that silence about estimations of the value of the Soviet era and its other symbols entails challenging of such narrative about holiday, which, however, does not get into question holiday itself.

### ***Discussion***

The following table summarises the research results (Table 6). It shows whether parties build their own ideology around holiday or they do not show the willingness to do it.

As it can be seen, in case of every studied holiday, majority of parties, although different ones, express willingness to build own ideology around these holidays. It is shown in previous subchapters that usually these ideologies are very different from each other even for the same holiday, which means disagreement inside the political elite.

Table 6. Willingness of political parties to build narratives around commemorative holidays

	Day of National Unity	Day of Russia	Victory Day
United Russia	+	+	-
Communist Party	-	+	+
Yabloko	+	-	+
Liberal Democratic Party	+	+	+
A Just Russia	+	-	+
Right Cause	-	+	-

In contrast to the “Soviet” Victory Day, directly associated with the legacy of the previous regime, although sometime negatively, the Day of Russia and the Day of National Unity would be a good tool to promote the vision of national history, the relationship to the past and to attempt to formulate a national identity. They are the direct ideological “product” of the new Russia, but it requires greater extent of agreement between political parties.

“Invention” of new public holidays can not be considered as fully successful. In the case of the Day of Russia, some political parties cannot even suggest own narrative for modern history of Russia. Poorly-designed grounds of Day of National Unity is evidence of unsolved grounds of national identity for 20 years.

Overall, the practices of celebration of holidays from “Russian” group do not have a systemic nature, which is evidenced in data polls. The possible reason for that is disagreement among political parties about the ideological content of these holidays, which is also presented in the research. Also, it proves the assumption, suggested in theoretical part, that national holidays are “unstable signifiers” because despite the fact that holidays make 24-hour “pause” in life, people can deliberately ignore them, not perceiving as “something special”; their meaning may change over time (Geisler 2009: 15-16). These “unstable”, weak holidays reveal the problem with construction of national narrative.



## ***CONCLUSION***

Studying holidays as tools of construction of national identity allows paying attention to how society's values are changing, how the competition of ideas happened and how a political technology can be used. The research tried, firstly, to analyse how the transformation of national identity of modern Russian society happened and, secondly, how it was mechanised by political parties through the introduction of new or revision of old commemorative holidays.

The construction of national identity does not restrict study only by discursive practices, which were designated as the ideology of holiday, but also provides an opportunity to focus on the evolution of celebrations.

The logic of analysis of contemporary Russian public holidays based on the fact that it was necessary to show how in case of some holidays (Victory Day) there was a gradual replacement of ideologically inconvenient meanings and in case of other holidays (Day of Russia, Day of National Unity), they were in a situation of invention of symbols and narratives related to Russian history.

The analysis has shown that the inclusion of political actors in struggle for symbolic meanings and practices of public holidays is most active where state is unable to offer a coherent narrative and forms of celebration. It concerns Day of Russia and Day of National Unity.

New holidays – Day of Russia and Day of National Unity – could be a good tool to promote the vision of national history, attitude to past and the formulation of grounds of national identity, as they are associated with a new stage in the development of state.

As the analysis showed, in the case of 12 June, government was not ready for the evaluation of ambiguous events of early 1990s, which on the one hand marked the collapse of empire, and on the other – opened the way for new achievements. This resulted in a loss of interest about the potential of Day of Russia and in updating tasks for symbolic filling new national holiday – Day of National Unity.

Most political parties reached 2005 without a clear idea of the practice of celebrating Day of Russia. Ultimately, the memory of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of new regime was and still is the main topic of discussions on Day of Russia. In this respect, in contrast to other political actors, who recognise that Day of Russia, though controversial, but the most important holiday in country over past 15 years, Communist Party has formulated its own narrative of Day of Russia as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe.

Attempt to link new, Soviet, and pre-revolutionary Russian history by inventing Day of National Unity, which is more suitable for the implementation of metanarrative of thousand-year history, was not proved to be successful. Contradictory grounds of holiday, no living memory about events of that period were the occasion for criticism by political actors. Parliamentary parties, except Communist Party, although they recognised holiday, but they have not been able to fill it with ideological content.

The only holiday, that does not cause much contradiction between political forces in the sense of its significance for national identity, is Victory Day, although parties suggest different interpretations of its history.

The disagreement amongst political parties about the symbolic meaning of holidays consequently causes the rejection or not complete understanding of symbols in people's minds. Therefore, the construction of new Russian national identity, different from the Soviet one, based on studied commemorative holidays, currently seems difficult. At the same time, 24 years of Russia is a relatively short period in history and there are chances that later government will develop concepts of Russian national identity more clearly and then it will be easier to promote it amongst population.

Overall, the work brings the understanding that in contemporary Russia political parties and non-system actors are unlikely capable to seriously compete for the meaning of holidays, to influence the direction of policy and interpretation of national identity.

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